

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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1 Samuel 17:(1a,4-11,19-23),32-49

NRSV

Israel's arch-enemy was Philistia, a nation on the Mediterranean coast. The two armies face each other across a river valley in the hills west of Bethlehem. In ancient times, a dispute between nations might be decided by individual combat, as David and Goliath do here.

"Goliath" (v. 4), "the/this Philistine" (in other verses) is very tall, wears a heavy "coat of mail" (v. 5) and bronze "greaves" (v. 6, shin pads), and carries a javelin (v. 7). Saul and the Israelites are intimidated by the sight of him. David prepares himself (vv. 20, 22); he says: "... who is this ... that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (v. 26)

In v. 32 David offers to represent Israel, but Saul questions David's military experience. David replies: as a shepherd, to protect the sheep, I have killed "lions and bears" (v. 36); I intend to kill Goliath using the same weapon (a sling). God has protected me from wild animals; he will protect me from Goliath (v. 37).

Saul agrees to David's offer (he has little choice!); he offers David his "armour" (v. 38), but David, unused to a coat of mail and a helmet, finds them cumbersome, and so removes them. He takes his sling, and stones from the river bed ("wadi", v. 40). "The Philistine" disdains David, curses him (v. 43) and insults him (v. 44). David answers: "I come ... in the name of the Lord ..." (v. 45); God will give him victory so that "all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (v. 46), that God prevails over material advantage (v. 47). David, using his unconventional weapon (one highly accurate in the hands of a specialist), slays "the Philistine" (v. 49). This victory is the start of David's move towards the throne.

Psalm 9:9-20

NRSV

Because each pair of verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, we know that this psalm and Psalm 10 were originally one, even though the themes are different: Psalm 9 expresses thanksgiving; Psalm 10 laments that deviants from God's ways, who hold God in contempt, pursue those devoted to God.

Those who know God (v. 10) will trust in him, for he is faithful to those who seek him. The *avenger of blood* (v. 12) is God; he will remember the pleas of those hurt by the wicked. Give me your grace, your freely given gift of love ("gracious", v. 13), you who restore me from death's door. "Gates of death" is a figure for Sheol: in Judaism, the abode of those who have died. The psalmist proclaims this in the Temple in Jerusalem ("Zion", v. 14). Vv. 15-18 express his renewed confidence: the "wicked", the ungodly have fallen into the trap they created by their deviant behaviour ("their own hands", v. 16); God is just. Their destiny (and

that of those who "forget God", v. 17) is to be in limbo in "Sheol". God will one day remember the needy; he will give hope to the poor (v. 18). May God intercede against the ungodly, who think themselves above mortality.

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

NRSV

As Paul and his coworkers, Timothy and Apollos, (*servants*) work together with God (the Holy Spirit), they urge the Christians at Corinth to "accept the grace of God" productively, i.e. "not ... in vain". Based on Isaiah 49:8 ("have", v. 2, is prophetic), Paul tells them that now is the time when God gives grace, his love to us: now we are being restored to union with God. The *servants* are aiding "in every way" (v. 4) they can. They have shown themselves true agents of God in enduring physical and mental pressures ("afflictions", vv. 4, 5a) and "hardships" (listed in v. 5b) – unlike Paul's critics – by the *fruits of the Spirit* (vv. 6, 7a and Galatians 5:22-23), using the whole offensive ("right hand", v. 7) and defensive ("the left") armament which God provides, whether honoured or discredited (by their critics, who even call them "impostors", v. 8, i.e. not true to God.) Seen as insignificant (as bad teachers), they are valued by true Christians, "dying" (v. 9) to self-centeredness but alive in following Christ; "sorrowful" (v. 10) that the Corinthian Christians feel hurt that he refused their aid (he did not need it), yet "rejoicing" that they are faithful; living in poverty, yet "making many rich" spiritually and "possessing everything" that matters.

They have laid everything (their innermost thoughts) on the table to the Church (v. 11). He loves without limits all at Corinth – even his opponents who do not love him. May his critics grow up ("children", v. 13) and imitate his love.

Mark 4:35-41

NRSV

Jesus has told the good news of the Kingdom to the crowds, in a way they could understand, but he has gone further with those close to him: "he explained everything in private to his disciples" (vv. 33-34).

After teaching from a boat, with the crowds along the shore, he now suggests to the disciples that they "go across to the other side" (v. 35), to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. A flotilla of boats follow, but they scatter before the storm. (He is "just as he was", v. 36, in the same posture as earlier, in the boat.) Squalls ("windstorm", v. 37) are common on the Sea of Galilee, for the hills around it are high. Jesus is "in the stern", v. 38, on the helmsman's seat, well above the waves. He is "asleep": he has complete confidence in God. The disciples see him as "teacher"; they do not yet know him fully. Jesus is awoken and *rebukes* (v. 39) the wind – as though it is a demon (see 1:25). To ancients, the sea symbolized the powers of chaos and evil. Jesus commands it to be still: only God can control nature. He castigates the disciples (v. 40): either they lack faith in God (do not follow Jesus' example of trust in him) or in him (as a worker of wonders). Their question in v. 41 is an implicit confession of Jesus' divinity: the sea obeys him as it does God in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:2). Jesus' power extends even to power over natural disasters, then thought to be the work of the devil.